

The Art of the Soviet Book, 1922–32

Susan Compton

The year 1923, when Aleksandr Rodchenko designed *Pro eto (About This)* and El Lissitzky *Dlia golosa (For the Voice)*, fig. no. 1), has often been regarded as the watershed in Soviet book design.¹ These two books of Vladimir Maiakovskii's poetry, printed in large editions with distinctive covers and inventive illustrations, marked a high point in an area in which Soviet artists excelled. Such designs did not, of course, leap fully formed like Athena from the head of Zeus; outstanding designs had been produced before the political revolutions of 1917. The years 1912–16 had seen unparalleled invention in books made by Futurist artists and writers.² Most of these had been produced, however, in editions of a few hundred copies, and by lithographic processes with minimal work by printers; some copies were further personalized by hand coloring, such as Ol'ga Rozanova's decorations to Aleksei Kruchenykh's *Utinoe gnezdyshko . . . durnykh slov (A Duck's Nest . . . of Bad Words, 1913).*³ *Tango s korovami (Tango with Cows, 1914)*⁴ was exceptional in relying on the work of professional printers for the setting of Vasilii Kamenskii's typographic poems. Furthermore, although remarkable publications like these were known to the art world, they reached only a very small public consisting mainly of people interested in avant-garde art.

After the political revolutions of 1917, avant-garde artists and writers—who were among the first to embrace the October Revolution—were able to reach a wider public with a few expensively produced publications such as *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo (Fine Art)*, an official periodical of Izo Narkompros (the Department of Fine Arts of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment), whose head, the artist David Shterenberg, designed the journal's Cubistic cover. The contents of its single issue reflect the brief power of artists such as Kazimir Malevich and Vasilii Kandinskii, though, whether for technical or ideological reasons, its publication was delayed: the editorial is dated May 1918, the imprint date is 1919, but the journal did not come out until early in 1920.⁵ Its printing, particularly of photographs of art works, was exemplary and *Fine Art* was later recognized as an equal to European art journals.

Between 1918 and 1920, a number of high-quality monographs on established avant-garde artists—for instance, on Kandinskii and Marc Chagall⁶—were also published, but writers and artists continued their experiments with books produced largely by hand.⁷ This was an attractive proposition because of the scarcity of paper in those years of civil war and because the books could be made in the studio, without the complication of publishing and printing houses. An album of colored linocuts was prepared by Liubov' Popova and another, in black and white, by Rodchenko;⁸ Varvara Stepanova experimented with words as well as imagery in her poem *Gaušt chaba* (1919), which, although she was a competent typist, she wrote by hand over newsprint.⁹ The culmination of these projects was the hand-decorated catalogues, typed by Stepanova, which Rodchenko and Popova—with Aleksandra Ekster and Aleksandr Vesnin—made for their exhibition $5 \times 5 = 25$, held in Moscow in September 1921 (plate nos. 264, 269). They used the occasion to announce their move away from experimental easel painting into design and their Moscow show—held at the All-Russian Union of Poets—was mounted in two parts, the second dedicated to applied arts: stage design and graphics.

Characteristic of the graphics were hand-lettered posters with surprisingly Expressionist script, such as one advertising a debate during the show.¹⁰ Among the participants in the debate were the writers Ivan Aksenov and Kruchenykh, who both had direct experience of the exhibitors' graphic work: two etchings by Ekster had been published in Aksenov's 1916 book of poetry, *Neuvazhitel'nye osnovaniia (Weak Foundations)*, and she had also designed the cover for his book on Picasso;¹¹ Stepanova had

made montages for *Gly-gly*, a Dadaist text by Kruchenykh (plate no. 97).¹² After $5 \times 5 = 25$, Rodchenko went on working with Kruchenykh, making covers for his small books with made-up words for titles, *Tsotsa* (plate no. 89) and *Zaum'*.¹³ For these he used handwriting, inscribing author's name and book title with colored crayons; for a third, larger-format printed book, *Zaumniki (Transrationals*, fig. no. 2), he made two linocuts, one with the three authors' names, the title, and a geometric design for the front cover, and the other with the publisher's imprint and his own name for the back. He cut narrow block capitals for the letters and thin lines for the design, so that the paper color (pink or green) showed through when the linocut was printed in black.¹⁴

Rodchenko's innovation for *Transrationals* has a parallel in his collaboration with the filmmaker Dziga Vertov on Vertov's newsreels, which were released from May 1922 onward.¹⁵ Silent film required lettering which could be read very quickly by the cinemagoer and Rodchenko wrote white letters on a black background—especially appropriate for film—or black letters on a specially created white ground, which more closely resembled a book page.¹⁶ He conceived the intertitles as an intrinsic part of the film itself, not just intervals between shots,¹⁷ and incorporated one of his own three-dimensional constructions in the film titles. A photograph of this was reproduced on the title-page of *Kino-fot (Cinema-Photo)* 2.¹⁸

This journal was launched at the end of August 1922 with a cover designed by Rodchenko, who worked closely with Aleksei Gan, the author of *Konstruktivizm (Constructivism)*, printed in Tver' the same year.¹⁹ Gan apparently worked directly with the printers: the text is composed, like a manifesto, of a series of slogans, to which he gave emphasis by varying the typography—using larger and smaller letters, capitals and lowercase, and differently weighted underlining.²⁰ Suitable typefaces did not, however, exist for display letters for cover design, and hand lettering continued to be used for Soviet book covers in the early 1920s. For his preliminary cover design Rodchenko drew ingenious "stretched" letters, writing KONSTRUKTIVIZM tall and thin on top of the author's name; the final version shows Gan's preference for simplicity: the title appears below his name, drawn in white lettering—a device borrowed from film titles; the design is sometimes credited to Gan himself, but was by Rodchenko.²¹

The collaboration of Gan and Rodchenko on *Cinema-Photo* marked a turning point in the design and content of Soviet periodicals. The covers of all six issues were dominated by Rodchenko's boldly lettered title. As befits a film and photography magazine, the covers included photographs and photomontages; indeed, Rodchenko developed montage technique while working on *Cinema-Photo*. For the first issue he arranged a page of printed material from 1921, overlapping the elements as he had done in his earlier collage works of art; he used a similar method for his montage on the cover of the second issue, this time overlapping discrete photographs. The third issue includes his *Psikhologija (Psychology)* and *Detektiv (Detective)*, which are described as "montages from a book on cinematography by [Lev] Kuleshov."²² Detective demonstrates how Rodchenko approached photomontage from his work on film: he links photographs of people and objects into a story by means of slogans that function like film titles. The cover of *Cinema-Photo* 4 carries one of his first mature photomontages, made by transforming a still photograph from Maiakovskii's 1918 film *Ne dlja deneg rodit'shiisja* (*Not for Money Born*) through the superimposition of an unlikely photographic element: he clad the shrouded corpse in an airplane-coffin.²³

As well as charting Rodchenko's progress with photomontage, the pages of *Cinema-Photo* reveal a new awareness in Moscow of contemporary publications from



fig. 1

El Lissitzky

Cover for Vladimir Maiakovskii, For the Voice, 1923.

Zincograph, 19 x 13.5 cm.

Lenin Library, Moscow.

Western Europe. The first issue included an article on dynamic painting by Ludwig Hilberseimer, illustrated with an example by Viking Eggeling; there was also a drawing of Charlie Chaplin by Fernand Léger. The latter came not from a Dada journal, as stated in *Cinema-Photo*, but from the book *A vse-taki ona vertitsia* (*And Yet the World Goes Round*), published in Berlin in January 1922.²⁴ The author of this Russian text—written in Brussels in 1921—was the widely traveled Il'ia Erenburg, whose theme was the internationalism of the new art. He gave a list of essential journals including the Parisian *L'Esprit nouveau*, the Dutch *De Stijl*, and the Russian *Fine Art. And Yet the World Goes Round*, with its striking cover designed by Léger, was the first book to unite new Soviet and European art; it included reproductions of work by Léger, Lissitzky, Theo van Doesburg, Picasso, Vladimir Tatlin, and Rodchenko. The book was soon known in Moscow—before July, Rodchenko had received a copy from Berlin.²⁵

Links with European publications were strengthened by Lissitzky, who left Moscow late in 1921 for Berlin, where he teamed up with Erenburg to found and edit *Veshch'/Gegenstand/Objet* (*Object*), an “international review of modern art” with title and opening manifesto in Russian, German, and French.²⁶ The first issue—a double one—came out in April 1922 with a dramatic typographic cover, where a black bar slanted diagonally across the colored page anchors the lettering. An earlier publication date had been envisioned, as the date line “February” is included in two unused variant cover designs, where the title, instead of being set against the diagonal bar, is enclosed in a circle, drawn over a vertical element.²⁷ Lissitzky may have rejected the circle for his final design for *Object* because it was such a dominant feature of Suprematist art, but he did not abandon Suprematism: on the title page of *Object* 3, he paired reproductions of Malevich’s “Suprematist objects”—a black square and circle—with a photograph of “technical objects”—a locomotive pushing a snowplow—previously published in Erenburg’s book. The unlikely combination assisted the declared purpose of the magazine—to introduce Russian art to Europeans and European art to Russians—because, at the time, the Parisian Purists attached particular significance to the word “object.” A text on Purism by Amadée Ozenfant and Claude Jeanneret (Le Corbusier) must have been received with interest when published in Russian translation in *Object*, especially by Russians who had espoused *veschizm* (the culture of things) the year before.²⁸ Lissitzky kept in touch with Moscow artists: in March he had written to Rodchenko, inviting him to reply to a survey of artists on art conducted by *Object* and to send photographs of his work for publication in the journal;²⁹ regular two-way traffic also resulted in the new international character of *Cinema-Photo*, since Hilberseimer’s essay on dynamic painting was taken directly from *Object* 3.

In Berlin, Lissitzky soon established his presence in avant-garde publications: an issue of *De Stijl* was devoted to a Dutch version of his picture book *Suprematicheskii skaz pro dva kvadrata* (*A Suprematist Tale about Two Squares*), and he was invited to provide cover designs for the leading journals *Wendingen* (*The Turn*), *Broom*, *G*, *MA* (*Today*), *Merz*, and *Zenit* (*Zenith*).³⁰ Lissitzky thus found common ground with left-leaning activists across the European art world. He contributed and borrowed ideas, and the special quality of his design can be seen in Maiakovskii’s *For the Voice*. For the book’s cover, he linked horizontal and vertical typography, using a device from acrostics and crossword puzzles, where the same letter is shared between words.³¹ Inside the book, he helped the reader find the poems by creating an index system using Suprematist symbols as well as words; he reproduced a drawing as frontispiece but invented a new style of illustration from

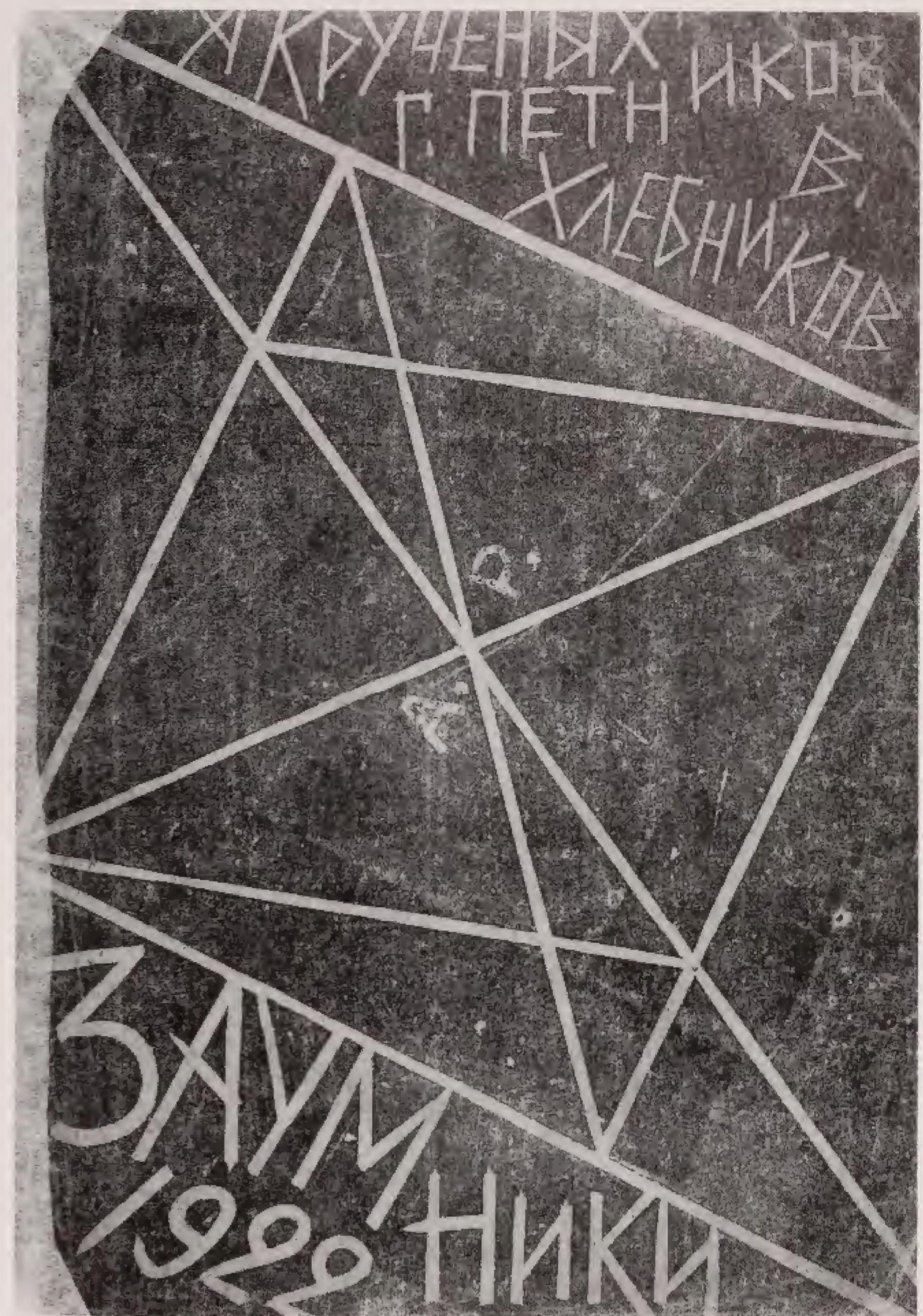


fig. 2
Aleksandr Rodchenko
Cover for Aleksei Kruchenykh, Grigorii Petnikov, and Velimir Khlebnikov, Transnationals, 1922.
Lithograph, 21.2 x 14.8 cm.
The British Library Board.

typographic elements for the poems. Some of his motifs can be connected with contemporary European design: the question marks and capitals for "A vy mogli by?" ("And could you?") resemble those on the cover of van Doesburg's manifesto, *Wat is Dada?*³² the printed hands for "Prikaz No. 2 armii iskusstv" ("Command No. 2 to the Army of the Arts") are like the ones Kurt Schwitters had used on the covers of his journal *Merz* since January 1923.³³ The similarities can hardly be by chance, for Lissitzky was close to both artists; Schwitters had printed Lissitzky's thoughts on typography in *Merz* 4. Lissitzky's dictum: "The words on the printed sheet are learnt by sight, not by hearing"³⁴ aptly describes his design of *For the Voice*.

During 1923, artists in Moscow continued to be aware of international publications. Gustav Klutsis ran the letters GORN together when he modernized the cover of the journal *Gorn* (*Furnace*, plate no. 493),³⁵ as had been done with the letters BLEU on the three issues of the Dada magazine published in Mantua in 1920–21.³⁶ This resemblance may, however, be fortuitous, because the enlargement of a four-letter word to the width of a magazine cover could lead to a common result. Klutsis designed simple, sans serif letters, printing them alternately in black and brown; this contrasts with *Bleu*, where the single-colored sans serif letters include an unusual diagonal to avoid the roundness of B and U. Klutsis varied the formula for another journal, *Proletarskoe studenchesvo* (*Proletarian Students*, plate no. 495), where he used alternately colored letters in another strong yet simple cover design. Effective sans serif lettering had already been designed by Anatolii Lavinskii, in 1922 at the Moscow Vkhutemas (the Higher Artistic-Technical Workshops), for the covers of Maiakovskii's poems, *13 let raboty* (*Thirteen Years of Work*, fig. no. 3).³⁷ Here the poor typeface inside the two volumes stands in strange contrast to the sensitive design and printing on the covers, but this is a feature—or weakness—of Soviet books from the 1920s.

It was Rodchenko rather than Lavinskii who designed the journal *Lef* (*Left Front of the Arts*)—a substantial publication launched, with Maiakovskii as editor, in March 1923.³⁸ As he had done for *Cinema-Photo*, Rodchenko invented for *Lef*'s cover a formula capable of variation; in the second issue, he substituted a photomontage for the words that appeared above the title in the first (fig. no. 4). Cover and montage are credited to "konstruktivist Rodchenko" ("the Constructivist Rodchenko"), making the allegiance of the magazine clear—though an illustrated article on George Grosz gives an unexpected Expressionist character to this issue, and this is increased by Rodchenko's cover photomontage of figures in close-up combined with newspaper headlines and text to suggest a factual story. A different kind of story is conveyed by his montage on the cover of *Lef* 3 (fig. no. 5), where the spirit of Dada seems momentarily to have conquered Constructivist design. A biplane, bearing the letters LEF, drops a fountain pen, which nearly hits an ape; the ape, in turn, directs a barbed arrow at the plane. Each motif is separate, as on the cover of *Le Coeur à barbe*, a single number of a "transparent journal" edited by Tristan Tzara, issued in Paris in April 1922 with a cover-design "story" composed of disconnected images cut from nineteenth-century prints.³⁹

In contrast, Rodchenko's covers for the four issues of *Lef* published in 1924 are more typical of Russian Constructivist design and bear little relation to the design of contemporary European periodicals. The difference may have been intentional, so as to highlight the distinctive quality of Soviet design. For instance, in *Lef* 4, *Gorod* (*Metropolis*)—a photomontage by a Bauhaus student, Paul Citroën—was reproduced opposite a montage by Popova representing her set for Vsevolod Meierkholt's multimedia production of

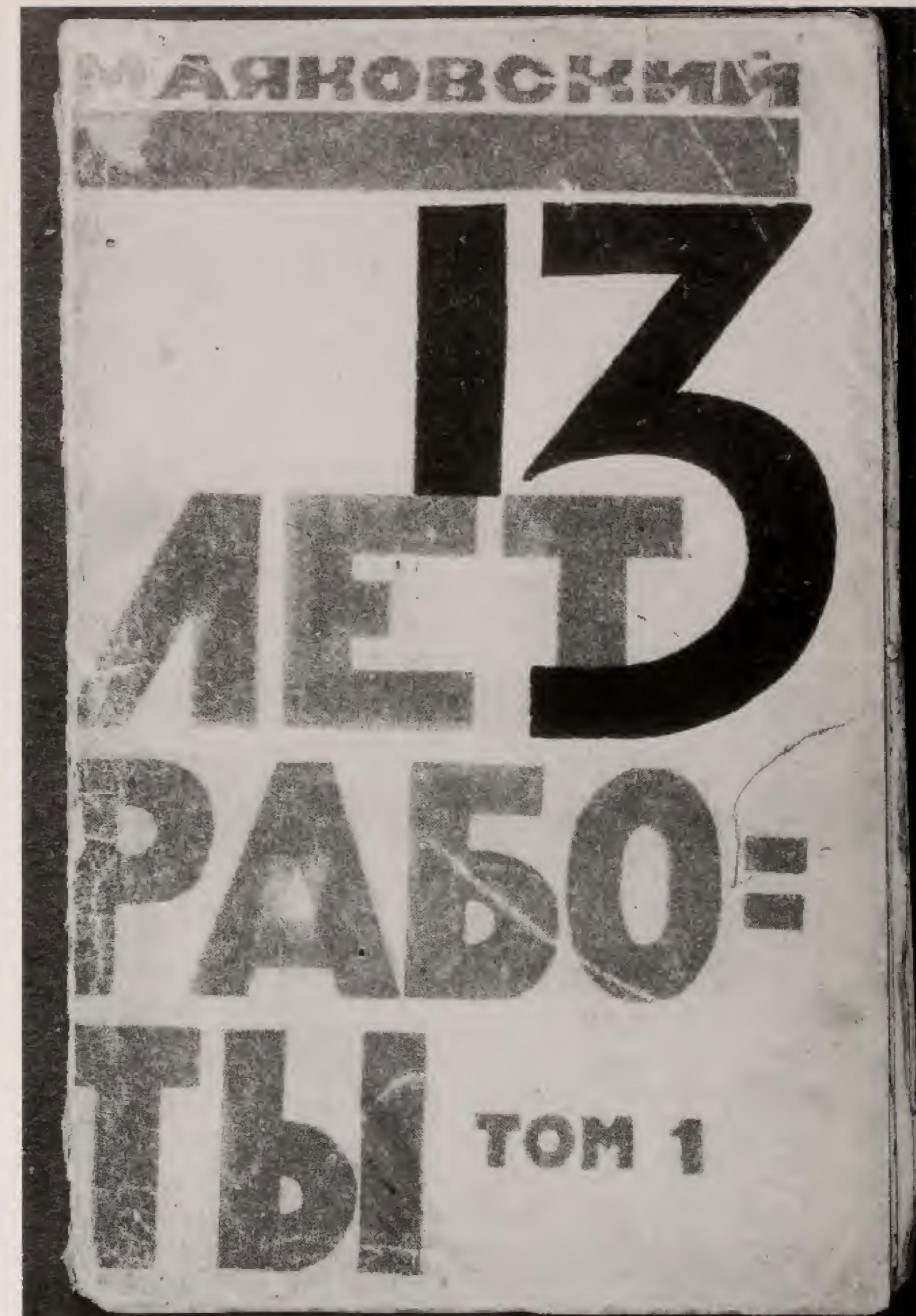




fig. 3

Anatolii Lavinskii

Cover for Vladimir Maiakovskii, Thirteen Years of Work, vol. I,
1923.

Lithograph, 17.9 x 11.9 cm.
The British Library Board.

fig. 4

Aleksandr Rodchenko

Cover for Lef 2 (1923).

Lithograph, 23 x 15.5 cm.
From the Resource Collections,
The Getty Center for the History of Art
and the Humanities.

fig. 5

Aleksandr Rodchenko

Study for cover for Lef 3 (1923).

Photomontage, 16.5 x 14.5 cm.
Museum Ludwig (Collection Ludwig, Cologne).

Zemlia dybom (*The Earth in Turmoil*).⁴⁰ The juxtaposition points up the contrast between the European approach, based on densely arranged cut-up photographs, and the looser Russian montage style, with its more direct relationship to film. No doubt in 1924 Rodchenko and Maiakovskii aimed at giving *Lef* a Soviet style in anticipation of the forthcoming *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* (*International Exhibition of Contemporary Decorative and Industrial Art*) in Paris, for which Rodchenko was chosen to design the catalogue.⁴¹ Textile designs by Popova, sports clothes by Stepanova, and book covers by Rodchenko—like the ones which had been illustrated in two colors in *Lef*⁴²—were shown in Paris in 1925. The exhibition also included Rodchenko's fittings for a workers' club with sloped reading desks and shelves which served admirably to display the front covers of Soviet books and journals: photographs taken at the time show how effective they were.⁴³ During 1925, Rodchenko and Stepanova also designed covers for Soviet technical manuals;⁴⁴ compared with the unremarkable typographic covers of standard publications, theirs often create an immediate visual awareness of the subject (automotive engineering, for instance) and must have served as an inducement for workers to read. Rodchenko and Stepanova recognized that covers of books and journals could serve as "posters" for their contents.

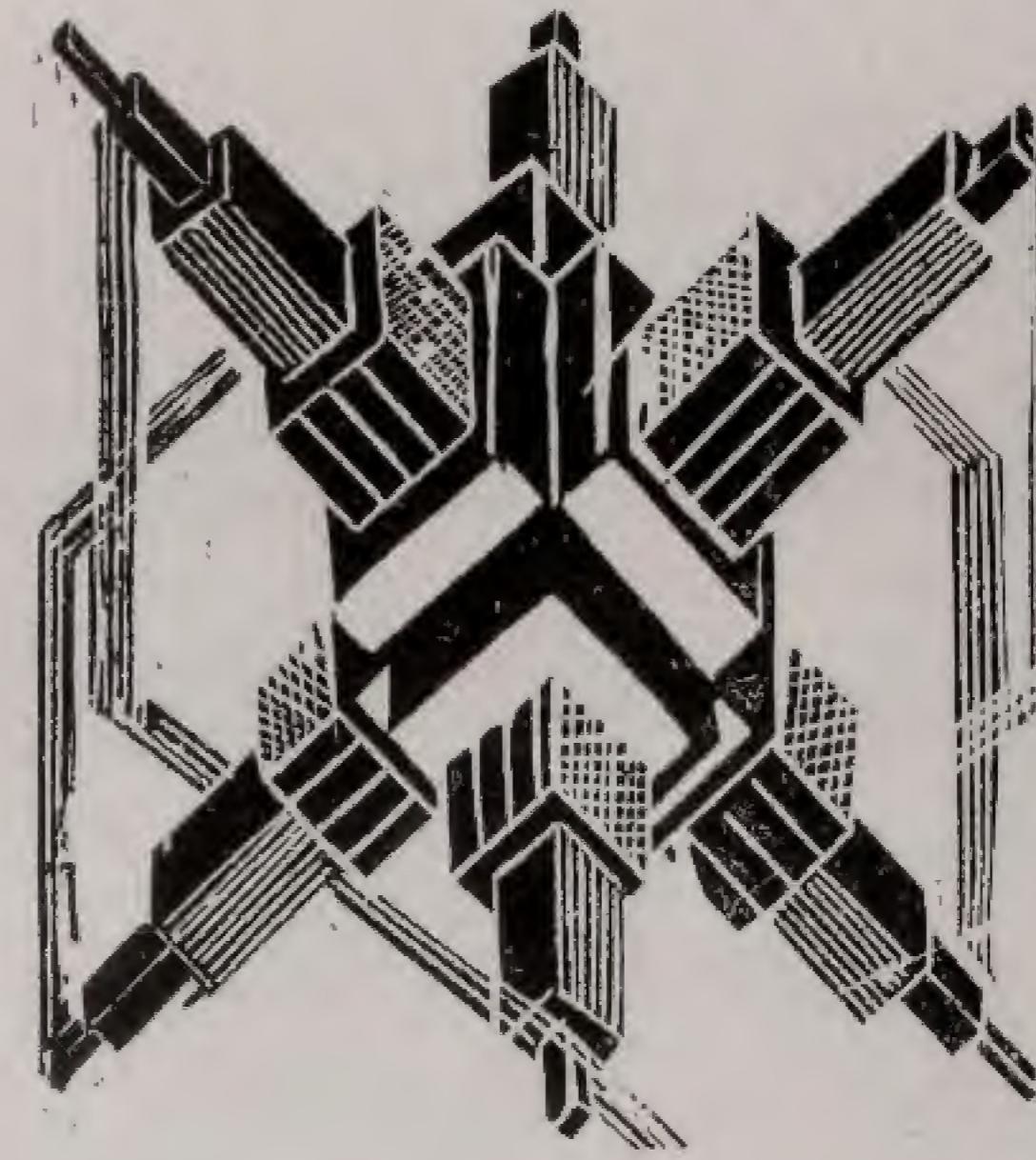
In the USSR, books and journals for sale were displayed in kiosks, and architectural drawings for outdoor structures were sometimes reproduced on book covers. Valentina Kulagina's *Radio-orator* formed a striking counterpart to the lettering on Kruchenykh's book, *Iazyk Lenina* (*Lenin's Language*, plate no. 496),⁴⁵ but, by the time Klutsis used one of his elaborate architectural motifs on the cover of Kruchenykh's *Chetyre foneticheskikh romana* (*Four Phonetic Novels*, fig. no. 6)⁴⁶ in 1927, such imaginative designs had generally been superseded by photographs of real buildings.

This move toward more direct representation in books and journals reflected a changing political climate with a desire for greater realism; Rodchenko used his own photographs for nearly all the covers of *Novyi Lef* (*New Lef*) when *Lef* resumed publication under this title in 1927.⁴⁷ He did not always use an unaltered photograph: for the third issue of 1928, he displayed the title over his own photograph of a street book-advertisement poster. He substituted the magazine title for the books on the poster and obliterated the slogan "Vse novye izdaniia" ("All New Publications"), and he touched out an obtrusive overhanging wire.⁴⁸ In photography, as earlier in photomontage, Rodchenko was indebted to cinematography, and the bizarre angles of many of his photographs reproduced in *New Lef* create an effect not unlike stills from Soviet films. In 1927, he continued to be engaged in work for the cinema: a photograph of the reporters' room he had designed for Kuleshov's film, *Zhurnalistka* (*The Presswoman*), was published in *New Lef*.⁴⁹

Familiarity with film technique as well as with photography is reflected in Rodchenko's design for the cover of Erenburg's *Materializatsiia fantastiki* (*The Materialization of Fantasy*, fig. no. 7).⁵⁰ For this he combined lettering with a photograph of a face in close-up and, instead of printing the whole head in positive or negative, printed the outer sections positively and left the central section in negative. He thus achieved strange three-dimensional effects, very appropriate for a flat book cover: the black-and-white image has an element of mystery which suits the book's title and contents. Equally effective, but in a different tradition, is the photographic cover which Lissitzky made the same year for *Arkhitektura. Raboty arkhitekturnogo fakul'teta Vkhutemas 1920–1927* (*Architecture: Works from the Architecture Faculty of Vkhutemas, 1920–1927*, fig. no. 10).⁵¹ He added red and black lettering to a photograph

А. КРУЧЕНЫХ

ЧЕТЫРЕ ФОНЕТИЧЕСКИХ РОМАНА



ИЗДАНИЕ АВТОРА
Москва 1927

fig. 6

Gustav Klutsis
Cover for Aleksei Kruchenykh, Four Phonetic Novels, 1927.
Lithograph, 25 x 16.8 cm.
The British Library Board.

of his own hand holding a compass, printed on graph paper, which he had used in 1924 as a component of a self-portrait, *The Constructor*.⁵² There he had combined drawing and stenciling with direct exposure and superimposed photographic negatives—one of them of his hand, which he had printed on top of his face. He had developed such techniques while living in the West and seeing examples of superimposition of negatives and photograms (yielded by placing an object on light-sensitive paper) by Man Ray.⁵³ In 1928, he used another photograph from 1924 as a cover for Il'ia Sel'vinskii's *Zapiski poeta* (*Notes of a Poet*).⁵⁴ Lissitzky's double-exposure of Jean Arp neatly reflects the two parts of Sel'vinskii's tale, which consists of the autobiography of the fictitious "Evgenii Nei" (whose name Lissitzky inscribed on Arp's collar) and "his" poems. Behind the Swiss artist's head is the Dada periodical *391*, which may seem a curious choice for a book by the Constructivist writer Sel'vinskii.⁵⁵ However, when Lissitzky had made his photograph of Arp in 1924, differences between Dada and Constructivism had seemed blurred because artists of both movements were working for related political aims—the building of a new society. But by 1928, the First Five-Year Plan in the Soviet Union and the rise of Fascism in Germany made Lissitzky's choice strangely inappropriate, even though the design is striking and "talks" to Rodchenko's cover for *The Materialization of Fantasy*.

The Five-Year Plan, put forward in 1927 by Stalin and ratified in 1928, resulted in a punishing drive to modernize the USSR. Canceling NEP (the New Economic Policy), the First, and then Second, Five-Year Plan placed the Soviet economy on a warlike footing which was accepted as a necessary stage in the rapid achievement of industrialization and the furtherance of Socialism. Many artists and writers spent time at the "front"—the construction sites of huge dams for hydroelectric power, new steelworks, and so forth. The almost revolutionary excitement of the time can be seen in a book of verses—*Komsomoliia* (*Young Communists League*, plate no. 523), by Anatolii Bezymenskii⁵⁶—designed by Solomon Telingater, a younger colleague of Lissitzky's. Inside a dull hard cover—anticipating the standardization of the late 1930s—Telingater brought the poems alive by varying the length of lines and by filling the spaces to left and right with stylized drawings or unlikely textures; he also included realistic photographs in lively layouts that impelled the reader onward through the book. The following year Telingater helped Lissitzky design an unusual catalogue for the *Vsesoiuznaia poligraficheskaiia vystavka* (*All-Union Printing Trades Exhibition*) in Moscow.⁵⁷ The two designers made an easy-to-use index to the sections of this comprehensive exhibition by graduating the height of the pages and using a different color for the top of each section. The cover was remarkably restrained, with bands of red and silver unevenly overlapped as though applied with an airbrush. Telingater's personal style was often more brash: he made an amusing cover for Semen Kirsanov's *Slovo predostavliaetsia Kirsanovu* (*Kirsanov Is to Speak*, fig. no. 9)⁵⁸ in a tall, thin format; his eccentric layout on the cover and inside the book seems more appropriate to Dada than to the Five-Year Plan.

The fervor generated by the Plan—in some cases spontaneous—lasted into the 1930s: a successor to Telingater's *Young Communists League* is Stepanova's design for *Groznyi smekh* (*Menacing Laughter*, plate no. 507), a republication of Maiakovskii's Rosta (the Russian Telegraph Agency) posters two years after the poet's death.⁵⁹ Here she varied the size of the pages, alternating full-width pages, carrying text, with half-width pages, carrying reduced reprints of Maiakovskii's cartoonlike posters. Stepanova gave the book an up-to-date appearance with dramatic photographic endpapers of marching Red Army soldiers; over them she printed a line from



fig. 7

Aleksandr Rodchenko

Cover for Il'ia Erenburg, The Materialization of Fantasy, 1927.

Lithograph, 17.2 x 13.2 cm.

The British Library Board.

日本活動寫真

B

O

K

C

ЯПОНСКОЕ
КИНО

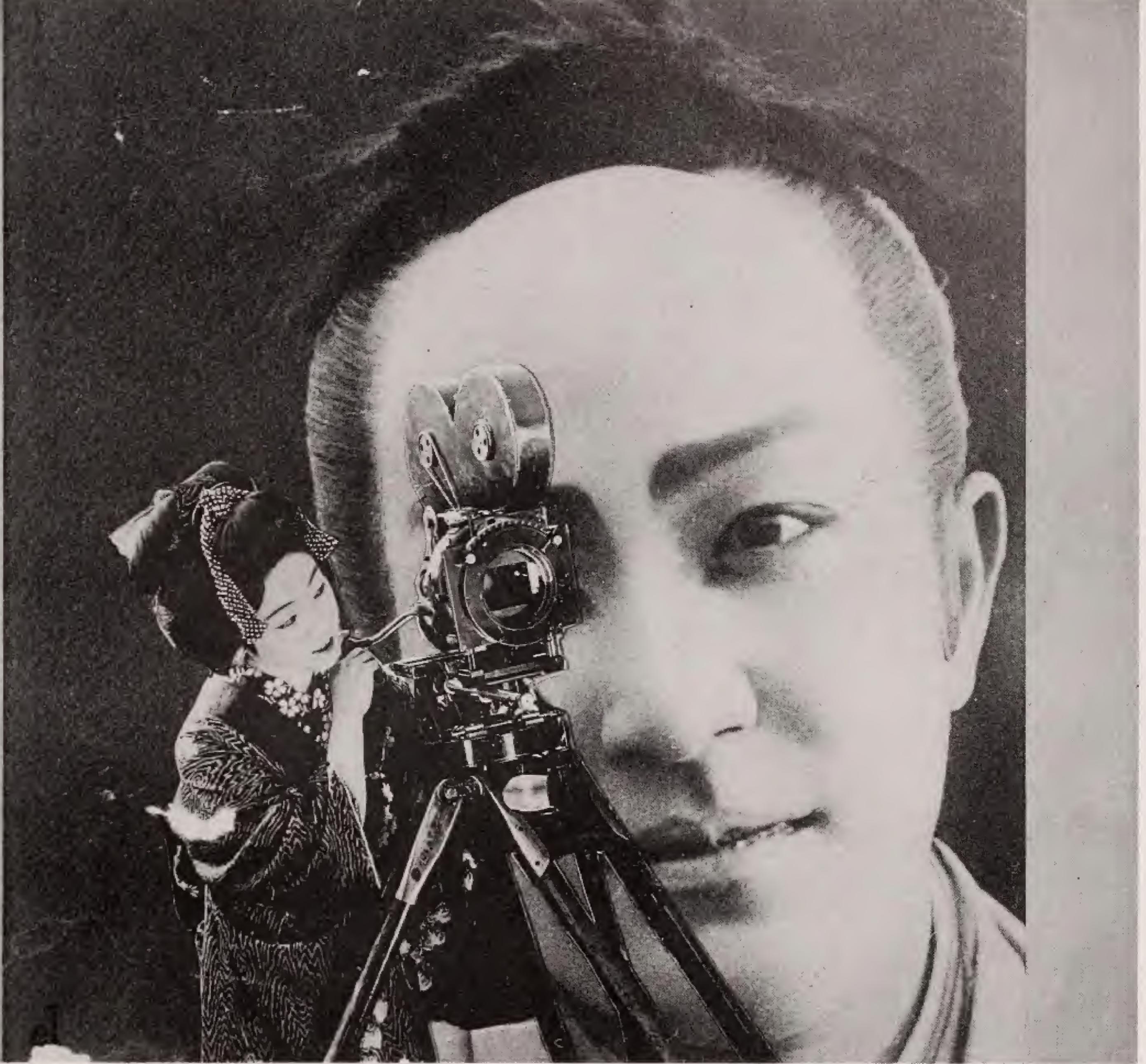


fig. 8

El Lissitzky
Cover for Japanese Cinema Exhibition, 1929.
Lithograph, 14.8 x 42 cm.
From the Resource Collections,
The Getty Center for the History of Art
and the Humanities.

Maiakovskii's poster verses: "Everyone to arms, Comrades!" In what must have seemed, in 1932, a timely preface (reprinted from the earlier publication), Maiakovskii explained: "These are not just verses. The illustrations are not intended as graphic ornamentation. This is a continuous record of the most difficult three-year period in the revolutionary struggle . . ."⁶⁰

The early 1930s were difficult years for artists, who had to come to terms with increasing loss of freedom of design. Both Stepanova and Rodchenko, however, seem to have been able to adjust to restrictions placed on artistic invention by decrees of 1932 and 1934.⁶¹ One of the main projects on which they worked with other avant-garde artists gave slightly more scope to designers, because *SSSR na stroike* (*USSR in Construction*, plate nos. 527–528) was a propaganda journal, intended for foreign consumption.⁶² In the issues which he designed, Rodchenko continued to exercise his skill at page layout, even though his inventive photomontages of 1933 gave way in 1935 to discrete photographs artfully arranged, and in 1936 to even more mundane images.⁶³ By this time, Rodchenko had abandoned the unusual viewpoints which had made his earlier photographs so original. In the last years of the 1920s, his photographs in *Daesh'* (*Let's Produce!*)⁶⁴ and *30 dnei* (*Thirty Days*)⁶⁵ had given those journals a quality of realism close to that of cinema; by 1936, this was discredited as Formalism.

Like Rodchenko before him, Lissitzky had absorbed influences from cinema by the time he made his masterly photomontage cover for the journal *Brigada khudozbnikov* (*Artists' Brigade*, plate no. 513) in 1931.⁶⁶ The connection dated to 1929, when he designed a catalogue for a Moscow exhibition of Japanese cinema (fig. no. 8),⁶⁷ though his design reflected an interest in film rather than an influence from it. He used strips of film as edging for some of the pages and arranged stills inventively, with the actors seeming to look at each other across the page. But that same year he met Sergei Eizenshtein and Vertov and became close friends with the latter, who, according to Lissitzky's widow, learned the technique of multiple exposure from Lissitzky. In turn, when he worked on *USSR in Construction*, Lissitzky laid out photographic material "like Vertov's running of a documentary film."⁶⁸

In 1931, *Artists' Brigade* published a report of a Moscow lecture in which Lissitzky summed up the current state of book design in the Soviet Union.⁶⁹ He wanted the book to be the unified work of author and designer, otherwise "splendid exteriors will constantly be produced for unimportant contents and vice-versa," yet he was against too much individuality, because "at our book exhibitions, the question of what, whither, why and for whom is not clear. Every book attempts to shout down its neighbour." He thus advocated the standardization of dimensions and types of books which increasingly came about in 1934–35. He deplored the lack of experimentation in typeface design in the Soviet Union compared with pre-Depression Germany, and no further experimentation took place in the USSR because of the hardening political situation. There was, nonetheless, a fundamental difference between Russian book designers and their West European counterparts in the ten years under discussion: the constant aim of the best Soviet designers was to reach a mass market rather than an elite; the fulfillment of this aim is amply demonstrated by the Soviet books and periodicals illustrated here.



fig. 9
Solomon Telingater
Cover for Semen Kirsanov, Kirsanov Is to Speak, 1930.
Zincograph, 21.5 x 19.6 cm.
Lenin Library, Moscow.



fig. 10

El Lissitzky

Cover for Architecture: Works from the Architecture Faculty of Vkhutemas, 1920–1927, 1927.

Lithograph, 24.2 x 17 cm.

The British Library Board.

Notes

1. V. V. Maiakovskii, *Pro eto* (Moscow and Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1923), cover and photomontages reproduced in A. N. Lavrent'ev, ed., A. M. Rodchenko, V. F. Stepanova. *Mastera sovetskogo knizhnogo iskusstva* (Moscow: Kniga, 1989), plates 69–79; V. V. Maiakovskii, *Dlia golosa* (Berlin: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo RSFSR, 1923). A facsimile of the latter was published by Verlag Gebr. Koenig, Cologne, and Jaap Reitman Inc. Art Books, New York, in 1973.
2. For detailed discussions of these books, see Susan P. Compton, *The World Backwards: Russian Futurist Books, 1912–1916* (London: The British Library, 1978); Gerald Janecek, *The Look of Russian Literature: Avant-Garde Visual Experiments, 1900–1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); and Evgenii F. Kovtun, *Russkaia futuristicheskia kniga* (Moscow: Kniga, 1988).
3. A. Kruchenykh, *Utinoe gnezdysbko . . . durnykh slov* (St. Petersburg: EUY, 1913).
4. V. Kamenskii, *Tango s korovami. Zheleznobetonnye poemy* (Moscow: Izd. pervogo zhurnala russkikh futuristov, 1914).
5. For dating, see Bengt Jangfeld, *Majakovskij and Futurism, 1917–1921* (Stockholm: Hylaea Prints, Almqvist and Wiksell, 1977), p. 34.
6. V. V. Kandinskii, *Tekst khudozhnika* (Moscow: Otdel Izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv Narodnogo komissariata po prosveshcheniiu, 1918); A. Efros and Ia. Tugendkhel'd, *Iskusstvo Marka Shagala* (Moscow: Gelikon, 1918).
7. An account of books produced by Kamenskii and Kruchenykh in independent Georgia from 1917–21 is given in Luigi Magarotto, Marzio Marzaduri, and Giovanna Pagani Cesa, eds., *L'Avanguardia a Tiflis: Studi, ricerche, cronache, testimonianze, documenti* (Venice: Università degli studi di Venezia, 1982).
8. 6 graviur L. Popovoi, cover reproduced in Angelica Zander Rudenstine, ed., *Russian Avant-Garde Art: The George Costakis Collection* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), plate 834; other linocuts, ibid., plates 833, 836, 838, 840, 843, 845, 847. *Graviry Rodchenko 1919*, title page and three linocuts reproduced in Selim O. Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko: The Complete Work*, ed. Vieri Quilici, trans. Huw Evans (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), p. 38.
9. Fifty-four copies, four of them numbered, were issued in 1919. See E. F. Kovtun, "Varvara Stepanova's Anti-Book," trans. John E. Bowlt, in *Von der Fläche zum Raum/From Surface to Space: Russia, 1916–24*, catalogue for exhibition organized by the Galerie Gmurzynska, Cologne (Cologne: Galerie Gmurzynska, 1974), p. 57.
10. The debate was advertised for September 25, 1921; the poster is reproduced in Alexander Lavrentiev, *Varvara Stepanova: A Constructivist Life*, ed. John E. Bowlt, trans. Wendy Salmond (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), p. 57, where information that the exhibition was held in two parts is also given.
11. I. Aksenov, *Neuvazhitel'nye osnovaniia* (Moscow: Tsentrifuga, 1916) and *Pikasso i okrestnosti* (Moscow: Tsentrifuga, 1917).
12. Stepanova's illustrations for *Gly-gly* are reproduced in Lavrentiev, *Varvara Stepanova*, pp. 18–29; part of Kruchenykh's play was published in his *Ozbyrenie roz. O stikhakh Terent'eva i drugikh* ([Tiflis?, 1918]). *Gly-gly* does not appear as a separate book in any of the extensive listings of Kruchenykh's works. Rodchenko included a quotation from it in his statement in

the catalogue of the Tenth State Exhibition, *Bespredmetnoe tvorchestvo i suprematizm* (Non-Objective Creation and Suprematism, Moscow, 1919), translated in John E. Bowlt, ed., *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism, 1902–34* (New York: Viking, 1976), p. 149.

13. Kruchenykh's books *Tsotsa* and *Zaum'* were, like *Zaumniki*, published in 1922, according to the listing on the back of his anthology *Zudesnik. Zudutnie zudesa* (Moscow, 1922). The cover of a copy of *Tsotsa* with collaged photograph is reproduced in *Von der Malerei zum Design: Russische konstruktivistische Kunst der zwanziger Jahre/From Painting to Design: Russian Constructivist Art of the Twenties*, catalogue for exhibition organized by the Galerie Gmurzynska, Cologne (Cologne: Galerie Gmurzynska, 1981), p. 219; the British Library's copy has tissue collage only. The cover of *Zaum'* is reproduced in Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko*, p. 117.

14. A. Kruchenykh, G. Petnikov, and V. Khlebnikov, *Zaumniki* ([Petrograd]: EUY, 1922).

15. The first of Vertov's *Kino-pravda* (*Cinema-Truth*) newsreels was released in May 1922. See Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960), p. 427.

16. Several of Rodchenko's film titles are reproduced in *Von der Malerei zum Design/From Painting to Design*, pp. 75, 77–81.

17. See "Konstruktivists," *Lef* 1 (1923), p. 251, translated and discussed in Vlada Petrić, *Constructivism in Film: "The Man with a Movie Camera": A Cinematic Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 11–12.

18. Six issues of *Kino-fot* were published between August 1922 and January 1923; it was intended as a weekly or possibly fortnightly publication but appeared intermittently between these dates. The page from *Kino-fot* with a photograph of Rodchenko's construction is reproduced in *Von der Malerei zum Design/From Painting to Design*, p. 78.

19. Aleksei Gan, *Konstruktivizm* (Tver': Tverskoe izdatel'stvo, 1922).

20. El Lissitzky recorded that Gan was one of the first Soviet designers to work in the printing house along with the composers. See his "Our Book," in Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts*, trans. Helene Aldwinckle and Mary Whittall (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), p. 363. Lissitzky may not have known that Il'ia Zdanovich had trained as a composer in Tiflis in 1917 in order to be able to do his own typography; see *Iliazzd*, catalogue for exhibition organized by the Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1978), p. 14.

21. Rodchenko's first design for the cover of Gan's book is reproduced in Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko*, p. 133. Khan-Magomedov gives the information that Rodchenko designed the cover as printed. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

22. *Detective* is reproduced in Lavrent'ev, A. M. Rodchenko, V. F. Stepanova, plate 62.

23. Both are reproduced in Susan Compton, "Art + Photography," *The Print Collectors' Newsletter* 7, no. 1 (March–April 1976), p. 13.

24. *Kino-fot* 1 (August 25–31, 1922), p. 10. It has not been possible to find a 1921 Dada journal which includes this drawing by Léger for Ivan Goll's *Chaplinade*; three of these drawings had been published earlier in 1922 in I. G. Erenburg, *A vse-taki ona vertitsia* (Berlin: Gelikon, 1922).

25. L. M. Kozintseva, letter to Aleksandr Rodchenko, July 10, 1922; "Rada ochen', chto vam ponravilas'" 'A vse-taki . . .,' in A. M. Rodchenko. *Stat'i, vospominaniia, avtobiograficheskie zapiski, pis'ma* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1982), pp. 116–17.

26. *Veshch'/Gegenstand/Objet* 1–2 (March–April 1922), 3 (May 1922). It was announced in the third issue that the fourth would be devoted to recent Russian art, and the fifth to American; neither was published, but *Zenit* 18–19 (October 1922) carried an article by Erenburg and Lissitzky on recent Russian art which may have been intended for the fourth issue.

27. The two designs in pencil and india ink belonging to the Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, are reproduced in Claude Leclanche-Boulé, *Typographies et photomontages constructivistes en U.r.s.s.* (Paris: Papyrus, 1984), figs. 42, 47.

28. In the autumn of 1921, before Lissitzky left Moscow, Osip Briuk had identified Constructivism and *veschizm* as the current modes of thinking at Inkhuks (the Institute of Artistic Culture). See Selim O. Khan-Magomedov, *Pioneers of Soviet Architecture*, ed. Catherine Cooke, trans. Alexander Lieven (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), pp. 146–47.

29. El Lissitzky, letter to Aleksandr Rodchenko, March 3, 1922, in A. M. Rodchenko. *Stat'i . . .*, p. 115.

30. Lissitzky made covers for *Wendingen* 4, no. 11 (November 1921), published in the late summer or early autumn of 1922; *MA: Aktivista folyóirat* 7, no. 8 (August 1922); *Zenit: Revue internationale pour le Zenitisme et l'art nouveau* 2, no. 17–18 (October 1922); *Broom* 4, no. 3 (February 1923) and 5, no. 3 (November 1923); and *Merz* 2, no. 8–9 (April–July 1924), as well as the typographical arrangement of an article in *G: Zeitschrift für Gestaltung* 2 (September 1923), p. 2. Lissitzky may have been responsible for the title and layout of early numbers of *G*. See *El Lissitzky, 1890–1941*, catalogue for exhibition organized by the Busch-Reisinger Museum, the Sprengel Museum Hanover, and the Staatliche Galerie Moritzburg Halle (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Art Museums, 1987), p. 187.

31. He had used the formula for the cover of R. V. Ivanov-Razumnik, *Maiakovskii. Misteria ili buff* (Berlin: Skify, 1922), reproduced in *El Lissitzky, 1890–1941*, plate 89.

32. Theo van Doesburg's manifesto, *Wat is Dada?*, was on sale at a "Kleine Dada soirée" held at the Haagsche Kunstkring on January 10, 1923. See Arturo Schwarz, ed., *Almanacco Dada: Antologia letteraria-artistica; Cronologia repertorio delle riviste* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976), p. 637. A copy of *Dlia golosa* belonging to the Dutch architect J. J. P. Oud is inscribed by Lissitzky, May 14, 1923; see *El Lissitzky, 1890–1941*, p. 187.

33. Covers of *Merz* 1 (January 1923), 2 (April 1923), 4 (July 1923), and 6 (October 1923) are reproduced in Schwarz, *Almanacco Dada*, p. 689.

34. El Lissitzky, "Topography of typography," in Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky*, p. 359.

35. *Gorn. Literaturno-khudozhestvennyi i obshchestvenno-nauchnyi zhurnal Vserossiiskogo i Moskovskogo proletkul'tov* 8 (1923).

36. *Bleu* 1 (July 1920), 2 (August–September 1920), 3 (January 1921); cover reproduced in Schwarz, *Almanacco Dada*, p. 656.

37. V. V. Maiakovskii, *13 let raboty*, 2 vols. (Moscow: MAF, 1922–23).

38. *Lef. Zhurnal levogo fronta iskusstva* 1 (March 1923). Seven issues appeared before August 1924, when the State Publishing House ceased its publication because of continued criticism that the journal was incomprehensible to the masses.
39. *Le Coeur à barbe. Journal transparent*, April 1922. Paul Eluard, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Erik Satie, Marcel Duchamp, and Tristan Tzara were among the contributors. The cover is reproduced in M. Giroud, *Cabaret Voltaire; Der Zeltweg; Dada; "Le Coeur à barbe," 1916–22* (Paris: Jean Michel Place, 1981), p. 223.
40. The two montages are reproduced in Dawn Ades, *Photomontage*, rev. ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), figs. 85, 117. Ades (p. 72) also gives a translation by Michael Skinner of the text on photomontage which accompanied these examples in *Lef* 4 (1924), p. 41.
41. *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes. Comité de la Section de l'URSS: l'art décoratif et industriel de l'URSS* (Moscow, 1925).
42. Book cover designs by Rodchenko were included in *Lef* 1 (1923); Lavinskii's project for a book kiosk and Stepanova's project for sports clothing in *Lef* 2 (1923); and fabric designs by Popova, Stepanova, and Rodchenko in *Lef* 2 (1924).
43. See photographs in German Karginov, *Rodchenko*, trans. Elisabeth Hoch (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), pp. 174–75.
44. For example, Rodchenko's cover for I. V. Gribov, *Zazhiganie, osveshchenie i pusk avtomobilii* (Moscow: Transpechat', 1925) and Stepanova's for S. R. Dadyko and N. D. Martynov, *Vagonnoe delo po programme shkol uchenichestva Zh. d. transporta* (Moscow: Transpechat', 1925), reproduced in Lavrent'ev, A. M. Rodchenko, V. F. Stepanova, plates 40–41.
45. A. E. Kruchenykh, with Aliagrov [Roman Jakobson], *Iazyk Lenina. Odinadtsat' priemov leninskoi rechi* (Moscow: Izdanie Vserossiiskogo soiuza poetov, 1925).
46. A. E. Kruchenykh, *Chetyre foneticheskikh romana* (Moscow: Izdanie avtora, 1927).
47. *Novyi Lef* 1–12 (1927–28). All covers were by Rodchenko.
48. The photograph of the advertisement is reproduced in Karginov, *Rodchenko*, plate 80, where it is dated 1924.
49. *Vasha znakomaia*, *Novyi Lef* 5 (1927), opposite p. 33. *Vasha znakomaia* was the working title for the film, changed to *Zhurnalistka* after the photograph was published. An illustrated account of Rodchenko's work on the film is given in Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko*, pp. 189–95.
50. I. Erenburg, *Materializatsiia fantastiki* (Moscow: Kinopechat', 1927).
51. *Arkhitektura. Raboty arkhitekturnogo fakul'teta Vkhutemas* 1920–1927 (Moscow: Izdanie Vkhutemas, 1927).
52. *The Constructor* is reproduced in Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky*, fig. 118; the hand is reproduced ibid., fig. 122. The hand was also used for an English advertisement for Pelikan ink. See *El Lissitzky, 1890–1941*, p. 191.
53. There is an example of a photogram by Man Ray with a description of the technique in *Merz* 2, no. 8–9 (April–July 1924), p. 88. The issue was edited by Lissitzky and Schwitters.
54. I. L. Sel'vinskii, *Zapiski poeta. Povest'* (Moscow and Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1928). For the cover Lissitzky used his double profile of Arp against the journal *391* (12 [March 1920]), taken in the summer of 1924. See Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky*, p. 52.
55. See Gail Weber, "Constructivism and Soviet Literature," *Soviet Union* 3, pt. 2 (1976), pp. 294–310.
56. A. I. Bezymenskii, *Komsomolit. Stranitsy epopei* (Moscow: Kommunisticheskii soiuz molodezhi, 1928).
57. *Vsesoiuznaia poligraficheskaiia vystavka. Putevoditel'*, proekt i detalirovka El' Lisitskogo, tipograficheskoe oformlenie S. B. Telingatera (Moscow: Izdanie K-ta Vsesoiuznoi poligraficheskoi vystavki, 1927).
58. S. I. Kirsanov, *Strovo predostavliaetsia Kirsanovu* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1930).
59. V. V. Maiakovskii, *Groznyi smekh. Okna Rosta*, ed. K. Soliadzhin (Moscow and Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literature, 1932).
60. Translated in Edward J. Brown, *Mayakovsky: A Poet in the Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 209.
61. By a decree of June 6, 1931, the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR empowered Glavlit (the Chief Administration for Literary Affairs and Publishing) to exercise control over manuscripts and drawings; a decree of August 11, 1934, declared that the technical makeup of all books was to be decided by the censors. See Maurice Friedberg, "Soviet Books, Censors and Readers," in M. Hayward and L. Labedz, eds., *Literature and Revolution in Soviet Russia, 1917–62* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 199–200.
62. Lissitzky's role as occasional designer for the propaganda journal *SSSR na stroike/USSR in Construction/USSR im Bau/URSS en construction* is discussed in Peter Nisbet, "An Introduction to El Lissitzky," in *El Lissitzky, 1890–1941*, pp. 44–45.
63. Compare the cover by Rodchenko for *SSSR na stroike* 12 (1933); pages with photomontages from 12 (1935) and cover of 5 (1937) reproduced in Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko*, p. 261.
64. For example, *Daesh' 14* (1929). See Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko*, p. 246.
65. For example, *30 dnei* 12 (1928), pp. 62–63. Three photographs are reproduced in Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko*, p. 245.
66. *Brigada khudozbnikov. Organ federatsii rabotnikov prostranstvennykh iskusstv* 4 (1931).
67. El' Lisitskii, *Vystavka Iaponskoe kino* (Moscow: Gosnak, 1929).
68. See Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky*, p. 88.
69. *Brigada khudozbnikov* 4 (1931), p. 23. Translated as "Do Not Separate Form from Content!" in *El Lissitzky, 1890–1941*, pp. 61–62.

The Great Utopia

The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde,

1915–1932

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

State Tret'jakov Gallery

State Russian Museum

Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

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State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

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Prefaces

Thomas Krens, Michael Govan
x

Vladimir Gusev, Evgeniia Petrova, Iurii Korolev
xiii

Jürgen Weber
xiv

Contents

The Politics of the Avant-Garde

Paul Wood

1

The Artisan and the Prophet: Marginal Notes on Two Artistic Careers

Vasilii Rakitin

25

The Critical Reception of the 0.10 Exhibition: Malevich and Benua

Jane A. Sharp

38

Unovis: Epicenter of a New World

Aleksandra Shatskikh

53

COLOR PLATES 1–318

A Brief History of Obmokhu

Aleksandra Shatskikh

257

The Transition to Constructivism

Christina Lodder

266

The Place of Vkhutemas in the Russian Avant-Garde

Natal'ia Adaskina

282

What Is Linearism?

Aleksandr Lavrent'ev

294

The Constructivists: Modernism on the Way to Modernization

Hubertus Gassner

298

The Third Path to Non-Objectivity

Evgenii Kovtun

320

COLOR PLATES 319–482

The Poetry of Science: Projectionism and Electroorganism

Irina Lebedeva

441

Terms of Transition:

The First Discussional Exhibition and the Society of Easel Painters

Charlotte Douglas

450

The Russian Presence in the 1924 Venice Biennale

Vivian Endicott Barnett

466

The Creation of the Museum of Painterly Culture

Svetlana Dzhafarova

474

Fragmentation versus Totality: The Politics of (De)framing

Margarita Tupitsyn

482

COLOR PLATES 483–733

The Art of the Soviet Book, 1922–32

Susan Compton

609

Soviet Porcelain of the 1920s: Propaganda Tool

Nina Lobanov-Rostovsky

622

Russian Fabric Design, 1928–32

Charlotte Douglas

634

How Meierkhol'd Never Worked with Tatlin, and What Happened as a Result

Elena Rakitin

649

Nonarchitects in Architecture

Anatolii Strigalev

665

Mediating Creativity and Politics: Sixty Years of Architectural Competitions in Russia

Catherine Cooke

680

Index of Artists and Works

716